



Research Programs

BENJAMIN MARGOLIS, MD
Associate Chair for Research

A year of great accomplishments

When I look back on 2007, I am extremely proud of the accomplishments of the departmental research faculty. This pride comes from many positive developments this past year, both individual research achievements—and there were many—and collective achievements.

For example, the most recent figures from the National Institutes of Health show that our department's researchers won \$94.9 million in NIH grants, more than a third of the entire Medical School NIH funding. That total also placed us seventh in the nation among departments of Internal Medicine at a time when many of our peer departments are facing reduced funding due to the very difficult federal budget situation.

Another reason for optimism: This year we began to realize the rewards of several years of aggressive faculty recruitment, and investment in our faculty through new or renovated facilities and research funding. We've also begun a formal mentoring program for junior faculty, in which senior faculty meet with them about their projects and their plans for preparing grants. In the ever-more-competitive hunt for NIH funding, this kind of sharing of experience and insight should help junior faculty greatly.

A third cause for optimism: evidence that the focus on translational research is bearing fruit. In the most recent fiscal year, the department's faculty filed 33 invention disclosures—more than twice as many as the next nearest department in the Medical School, and more than a quarter of the school's 116 total disclosures.

As we move forward into 2008, the push to translate laboratory findings into clinical research and clinical practice will continue. We'll also step up our efforts to link researchers and clinicians with one another to form "destination programs" in which patients from far and near can receive the most advanced treatment for their condition, including access to clinical trials.

This effort, of course, will be enhanced by the news that our Medical School has won a \$55 million *Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA)* from the NIH, which will be based in the Michigan Institute for Clinical and Health Research (MICHR) headed by **Dan Clauw, MD**, of Rheumatology. Others from the department are heavily involved in overseeing segments of the CTSA, including MICHR associate

directors **Blake Roessler, MD**, Rheumatology; **Gil Omenn, MD, PhD**, Molecular Medicine & Genetics; and **John Wiley, MD**, Gastroenterology; and program directors Ray Hutchinson, MD, Hematology/Oncology; **David Schteingart, MD, MEND**, and **John Piette, PhD, MSC**, General Medicine.

Although this grant will serve the entire Medical School, the Ann Arbor VA and the University's other health science schools, our department is well positioned to take advantage of it. The CTSA grant will consolidate and expand the University's infrastructure for clinical and translational research. Simply put, that means that we'll have unified, "one-stop shopping" resources for clinical researchers—including a pilot grant program that will provide seed money to jump start new projects. In fact, 11 of our department's faculty lead teams that have already been awarded pilot grants in the first round of competition. The department has added its support to many of these projects as well.

Even as we look back on all of this positive news, the storm clouds surrounding the federal research budget continue to threaten us. Only one in every 10 grant applications to the NIH are now being funded, and we've had some faculty who have had to return to full-time clinical work because of the unfavorable research climate. Others are hanging in there, thanks to bridging funds from the department—over \$1 million this year alone.

The other issue we face is the shortage of space—yes, even with the opening of the Biomedical Science Research Building (BSRB) and the renovation of the Medical Science buildings. This is due to the need to vacate and eventually tear down the outmoded Kresge Research Buildings that served us well for so many years. We've been able to lease some laboratory space, but the crunch will continue as we continue to recruit promising new faculty. The Medical School will need to make major investments in new research facilities in the immediate future.

While we had a very positive year in 2007, we will need the support of our faculty, our donors, and our administration as we move forward. More than ever we will need to tap resources outside the federal and state governments as we grow our research efforts to battle human disease.